

SHOP / VEND:

Reconciling the Future of (in)formal Exchange in Saigon's Public Market

by Tiffany Chu

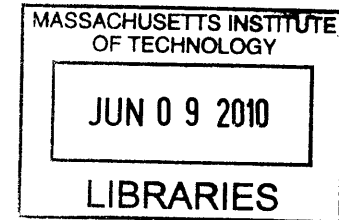
Submitted to the Department of Architecture in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Science as recommended by the Department of Architecture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology

June 2010

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Signature of Author

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be "Tiffany Chu", written over a horizontal line.

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Accepted by

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ABSTRACT

At the heart of downtown Ho Chi Minh City, the bustling Ben Thanh market is where vendors have come to sell their wares since the 17th century, and where throngs of locals and tourists alike come to buy, eat, and engage in general exchange and consumption. This marketplace and its vendor population have been instrumental in shaping the form of the surrounding urban structure and patterns of life, as well as the nature of the shopping and tourist experience in Vietnam under the guise of 'culture'. With four solid walls erected that define the interior and exterior of the Ben Thanh Market, the existing French colonial building acts as a fortress -- a spatial construct of exclusion that prevents the potentially fruitful intermingling and reconciliation of the formal shop owner with the informal street vendor.

This thesis analyzes the condition of both the shop owner and street vendor in Vietnam, and proposes a platform for exchange while re-conceptualizing Ben Thanh as a new hybrid experience of modern shopping and traditional marketplace in the context of other public markets around the world. Rethinking boundaries, edges, and cultural notions of space, this project delves into the relationships between body, street, and vending furniture as the inspirational instigators for bringing together the formal and the informal.

Thesis Supervisor: Shun Kanda

Title: Senior Lecturer in the Department of Architecture

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many thanks:

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CONTENTS

- 1 Context + Field Research
- 3 Analysis
- 4 Design Propositions
- 5 Appendix
- 6 Bibliography

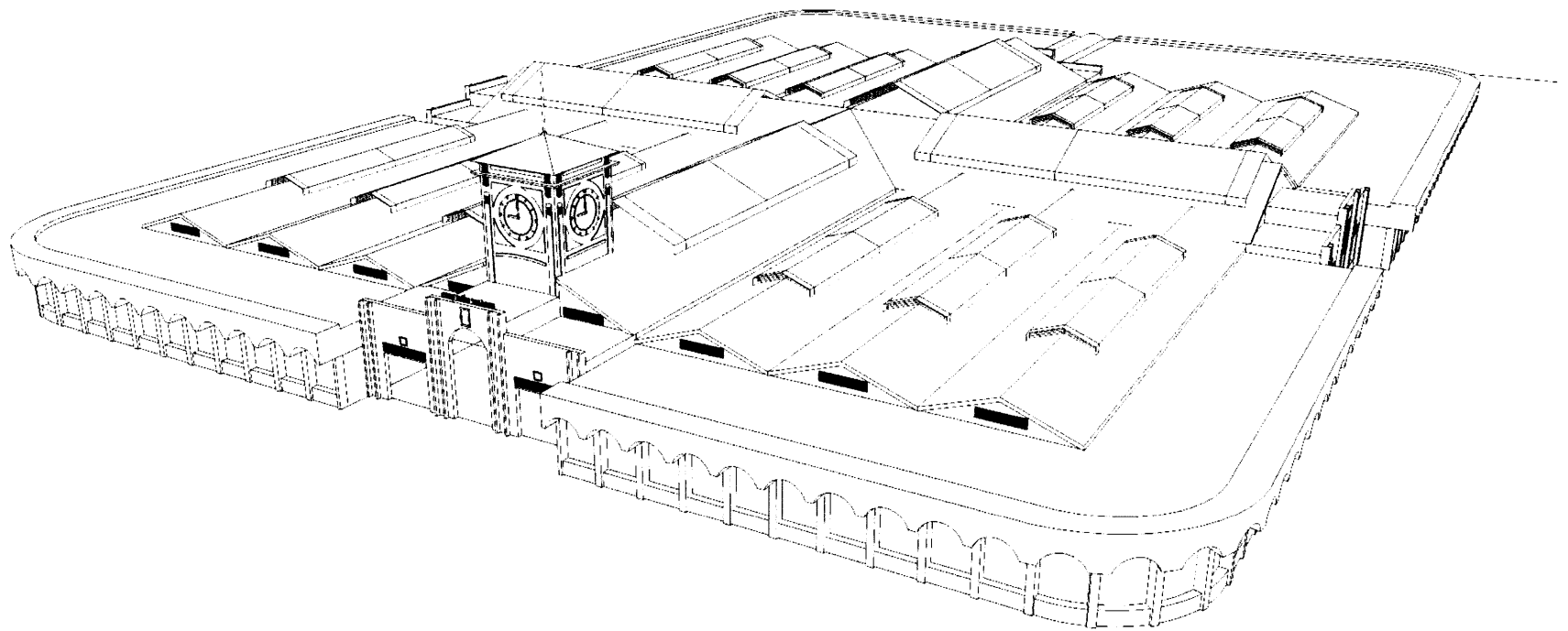
CONTEXT +
FIELD RESEARCH



THE BEN THANH MARKET

With 15,000 visitors meandering through the 140,000 square-foot building daily, Ben Thanh is Ho Chi Minh City's largest and most famous marketplace. After taking over the Gia Dinh Citadel in 1859, the French colonialists built a large covered market on the site. The thatch-roofed and mud-floored Ben Thanh Market stood near large canals which are now the streets of Le Loi (then Bonard), Nguyen Hue (Charner), Ham Nghi (De la Somme) and Pasteur (Pellerin). In 1870, a fire razed the market to the ground and the French decided to build a new one with metal frames -- which became the new Ben Thanh in District 1, and the largest market in Saigon. (VNS, Saigon Today).

In 1985, the market underwent a major renovation, which resulted in expansion, but much still remained the same: the market gates on the four sides, and the famous clock on the southern gate that is a landmark symbol of Saigon.



With four solid walls erected that define the interior and exterior of the Ben Thanh Market, the existing French colonial building acts as a fortress -- a spatial construct of exclusion that prevents the potentially fruitful intermingling and reconciliation of the formal shop owner with the informal street vendor.







FORMAL SHOP OWNERS

These shop owners rent spaces for their stall inside the marketplace. Some rental stalls are higher than others, depending on location and size -- many are handed down from parents to children, and have been owned by the same family for several decades.



INFORMAL STREET VENDORS

The term 'informal sector' was first coined by British anthropologist Keith Hart in 1971, to describe the multitude of "often temporary economic strategies adopted by migrant workers in Ghana in the face of a marginal job market which, in the aggregate, responded to real social needs" (Cross 1998).





THE CONCEPT OF 'THIRD SPACE' AND THE STREET

Oldenburg calls one's "first place" the home and those that one lives with. The "second place" is the workplace — where people may actually spend most of their time. Third places, then, are "anchors" of community life and facilitate and foster broader, more creative interaction.

All societies already have informal meeting places; what is new in modern times is the intentionality of seeking them out as vital to current societal needs. Oldenburg suggests these hallmarks of a true "third place": free or inexpensive; food and drink, while not essential, are important; highly accessible; proximate for many (walking distance); involve regulars — those who habitually congregate there; welcoming and comfortable; both new friends and old should be found there. (Ray Oldenburg, 1991).

Another perspective is from Edward Soja, who defines thirdspace as: a category that is neither material space that we experience nor a representation of space — but a space of representation that bears the

possibility of new meanings, and activated through social action and imagination, for instance, garage sales and street vending (Soja 2000).

Everyday urban design begins with respecting and honoring the daily rituals and cycles that shape communities...In everyday contexts, designers are asked to facilitate the portraits that communities desire to draw for themselves.



LOCATION OF SELECT INTERVIEWS NEAR BEN THANH MARKET



Throughout my time in Ho Chi Minh City, a variety of interviews with street vendors and shop owners were conducted in the proximity of Ben Thanh Market. We chatted with them in Vietnamese or Mandarin, about their concept of space, how they occupy the street, their relationship with the formal shop owners, the police, and what they would like to see improved either on the street or inside the Ben Thanh Market. The area in which we interviewed included the streets of Phan Chu Trinh, Le Thanh Ton, Nguyen Trung Truc, Truong Dinh, Phan Boi Chau, Luu Van Lang, and Le Loi.

With the assistance of my peers Minh Huynh-Le and Nguyen Thi Minh Chau, some of the findings included (see map to the left):

1. Woman selling lucky money packets on Phan Chu Trinh

--Originally from Tien Giang (My Tho), now resides in district 4
Only sells the money packets some days because people really only use them during Tet

--Right now she sells in this one spot on the sidewalk outside the market

--Hours: am – 5 pm (people only start really buying around midmorning like 9 am or so)

--After 5 pm she must leave because the sidewalk will be covered with the nighttime street shops (that are large, have to be set up)

--All other times of the year she sells lottery tickets and is a migrant woman

--100,000-150,000 VND profit daily

--Takes her stuff home and to work with her daily

--Police sometimes chase her, take her stuff for 10 days; or police give her a fine

--Has good relationships with fellow sellers because her stuff is small and doesn't really get in people's way since she sits on the curb / no fees for space use

2. Woman selling fruit on Phan Chu Trinh

--From Hue, now lives in Binh Thanh

--Works everyday 5 am-11 pm

--Takes a xe om to work everyday with her goods (no storage)

--Buys her goods from the Thu Duc market

--Police sometimes fine her, it used to be smaller "a few years ago it was 40000", but now it is 75,000

--Has been selling for 10 years

--Keeps her fruit and supplies in storage for 300,000/month

--No taxes/rent for sidewalk space

--Store owners she is in front of don't care because it is just a small sized 'shop'

--Says that the people around also like her

--100,000-200,000 VND a day

--Has to keep the sidewalks/paths for xe oms and pedestrians clear so that people can walk into the stores along the street – so it's like her way of supporting the store owners

3. Woman with sidewalk drink shop on Phan Chu Trinh

--Lives in Q5, lives in a rented room near the market. Did not answer where she was originally from

--Has been selling everyday for a long time with her husband

--Morning – 8 pm

--Her shop is located between two jewelry stores, doesn't have to pay tax or rent

--Has a great relationship with the jewelry store owners because she is allowed to store her tables, chairs, and other supplies there as well.

--A relative has the same type of drinks shop next "door" to her and they share stuff. Which is great because they can both earn a living that's more profitable and it eliminates the competition

--Police fine her – well, she chooses to be fined rather than run because she can't run

4. Woman selling Che on Le Thanh Ton

--Originally from Hue, now Q8

--Everyday from am-early afternoon or sell out

--No competition, migrant seller so she moves around a bit

--Stores her stuff in a paid storage unit for 200,000 a month

--Police chase her and fine her 75,000 now, but 4 years ago there were no police

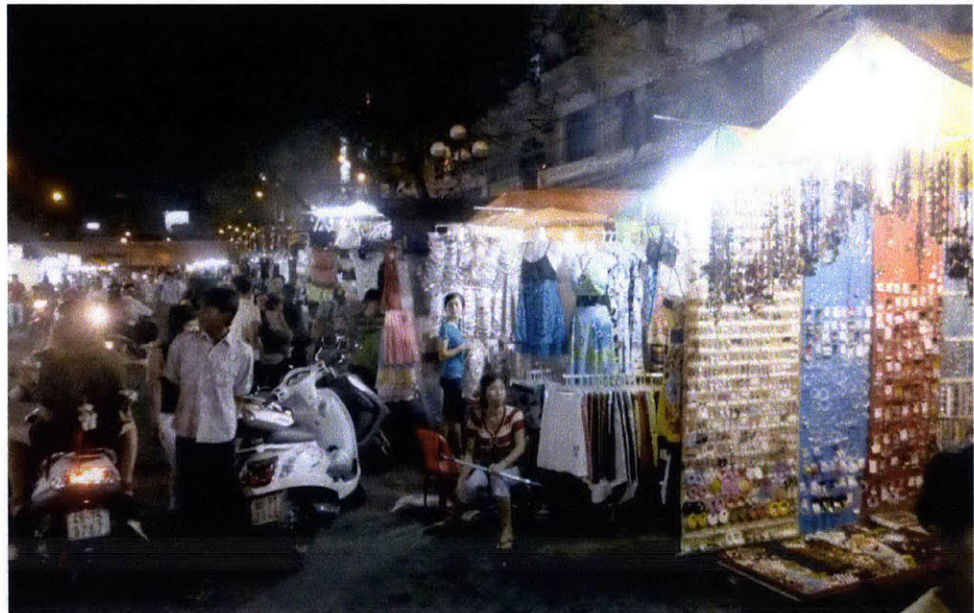
--Many foreigners in HCMC, especially near Ben Thanh market
--Street sellers like her make the city less pretty, but she has to make a living so she will continue to do it
--Commutes by bus everyday

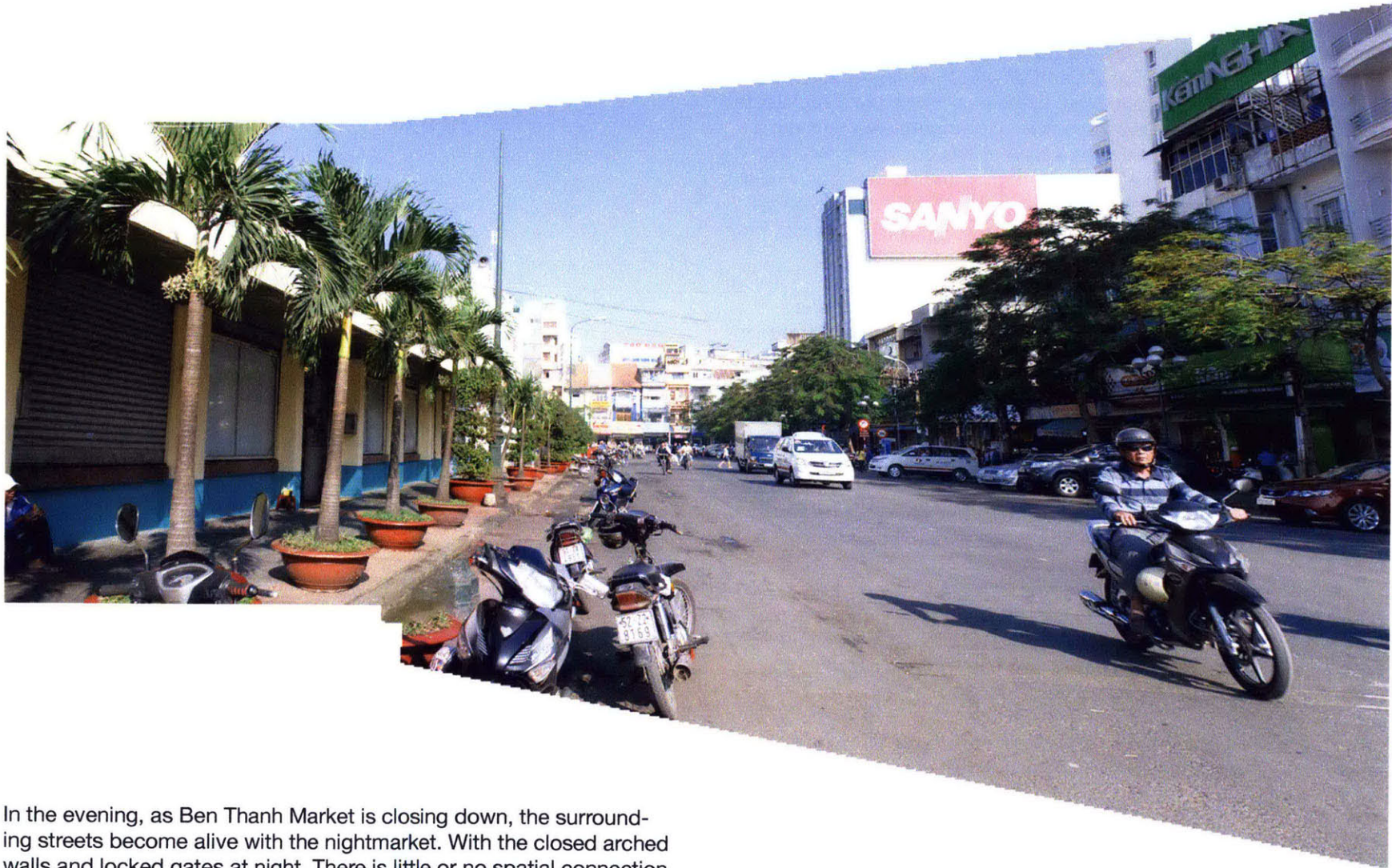
5. Man inside Ben Thanh Market, selling fabrics

--Yes, I sell here everyday
--No, sometimes we arrange the show of fabrics in different orientations depending on the mood
--I like Ben Thanh market, many tourists, very profitable
--I would not want to move to the outside
--A little hot inside, stuff
--Sometime too many people close together
--Lots of yelling, but that is selling
--I sell with my aunt
--Mostly sell to tourists, not locals, but lots of locals also come here to buy produce, meat, fish, etc.

6. Woman inside Ben Thanh Market, selling artisan goods and trinkets

--I have been selling here since I was young, my mother handed down the shop space to me
--My bamboo bowls and other wares are made from another place in Vietnam, I buy wholesale and bring to here
--I must close down shop everyday at 6.30pm, lock the sliding metal doors that come down
--Storage is here in my shop too
--I like it when tourists come by
--I always arrange my wares in the same way, with the same shelves and poles
--Ben Thanh market is a good place, very consistent
--But bad ventilation, hot, crowded
--I make more than most street vendors outside, daily -- they have a hard job





In the evening, as Ben Thanh Market is closing down, the surrounding streets become alive with the nightmarket. With the closed arched walls and locked gates at night, There is little or no spatial connection or blurring between the inside of the building and the vibrant outside street vendors that pop up starting around 6pm.

THE CASE OF THE 'INFORMAL' PUBLIC SPACE

According to Mirko Pogoreutz, "It must therefore become a task of municipal politics to keep open spaces for such unplanned, spontaneous urban articulation" (on Urban Catalyst in Berlin –who conducts research on 'the margins of official forms of architecture.'). Architects can find in temporary uses solutions for urban problems by means other than architectural or design interventions communicated in abstract plans. In a world where extremely careful urban planning is implemented in overdeveloped cities, what is the future of informal spaces, such as those that the street vendors inhabit? How can they be linked and reconciled with established public spaces?

In 2001, planners Maartin Hajer and Arnold Reijndorp redefined public space as "cultural exchange in which friction and confrontation are real possibilities" (In Search of New Public Domain). They point to public spaces that are not merely homogenous, urban renewal-like responses to "shopping, or privatization, or crime," and instead have stronger "liminal spaces"—in-betweens and transitions particularly between public and private spaces, blurring of class lines, integration of media and transit forms. "The shift from public space to consumer-oriented space has gone hand in hand with a shift from a designed environment to a designed experience," cites book reviewer Dana Cuff.

Another thought-provoking statement presented by Cuff is the fact that "the public" is really multiple publics, and that the terms public sphere, space, square, and domain each hold very different implications (Harvard Design Magazine, vol. 1 no. 30).

I was particularly drawn in by Crawford's definition of this kind of space that I thought of when I interviewed these vendors:

"Woven into the patterns of everyday life, it is difficult even to discern these places as public space. Trivial and commonplace, sidewalks, front yards, parks, and parking lots are being claimed for new uses and meanings by the poor, the recently immigrated, the homeless, and even the middle class. These spaces exist physically somewhere

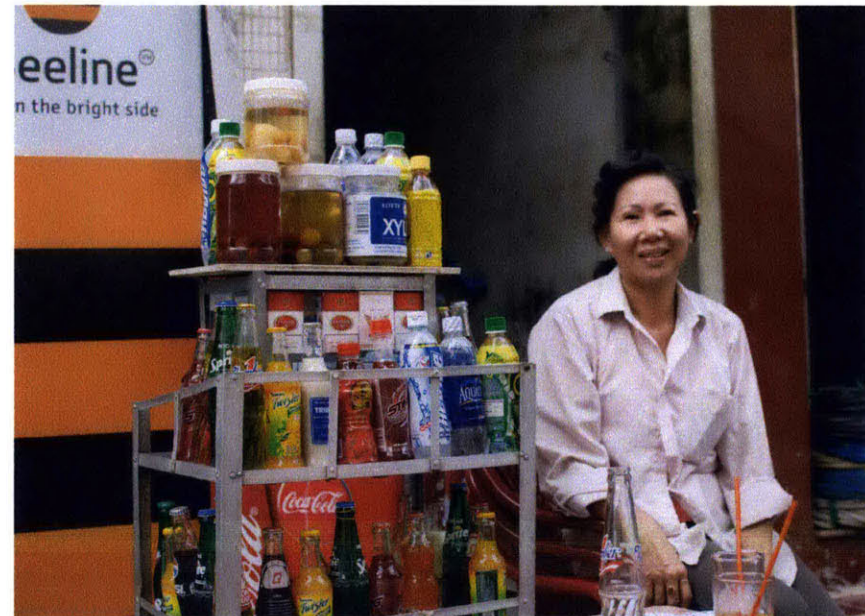


in the junctures between private, commercial, and domestic. Ambiguous and unstable, they blur our established understandings of these categories in often paradoxical ways. They contain multiple and constantly shifting meanings rather than clarity of function. In the absence of a distinct identity of their own, these spaces can be shaped and redefined by the transitory activities they accommodate. Unrestricted by the dictates of built form, they become venues for the expression of new meanings through the individuals and groups who appropriate the spaces for their own purposes. Apparently empty of meaning, they acquire constantly changing meanings – social, aesthetic, political, economic – as users reorganize and reinterpret them” (Margaret Crawford 25).

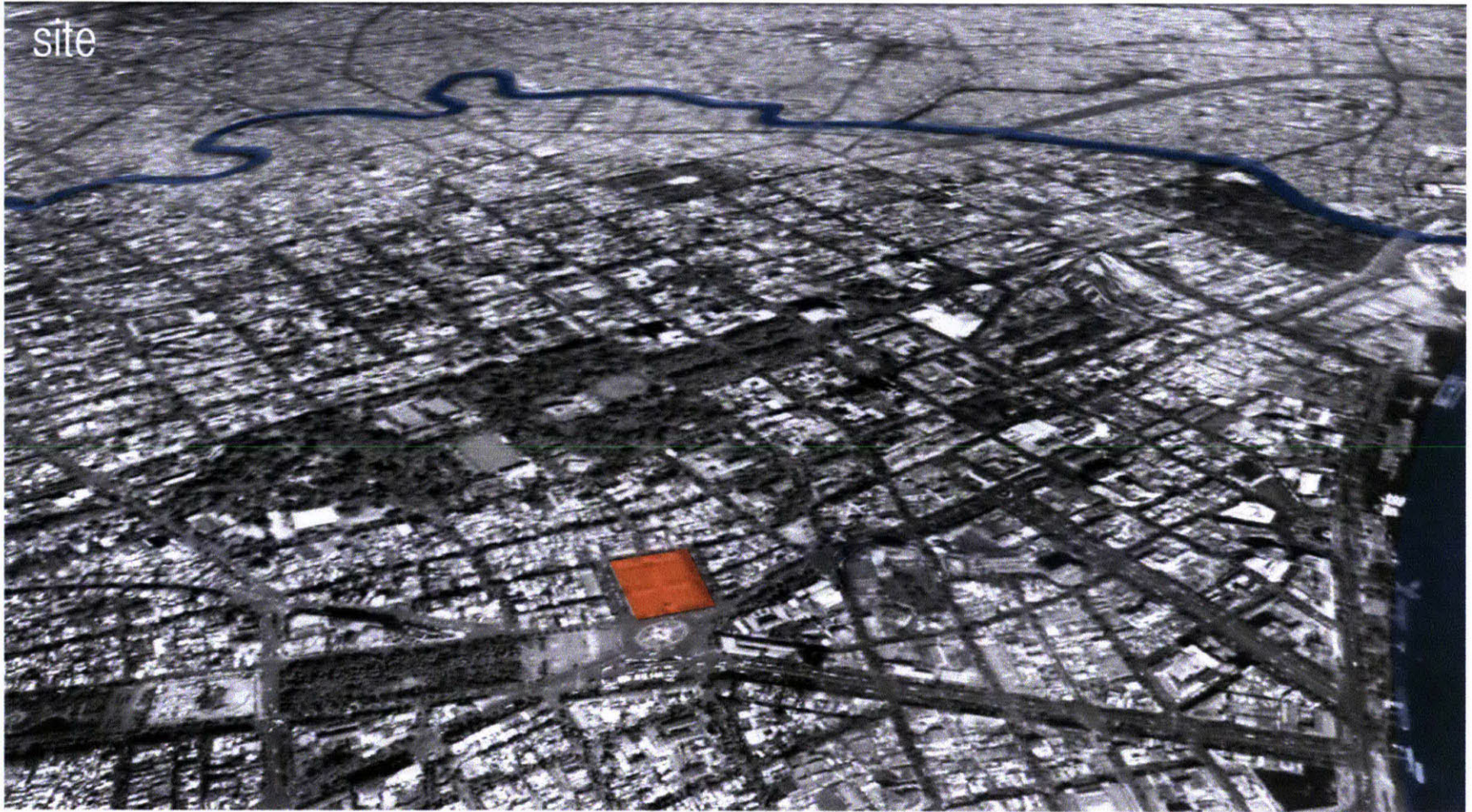
How can one define ‘the space between’ or ‘informal’ or ‘pseudo-public’? Drawing from the Situationists -- existing in between such defined and physically identifiable realms as the home, the workplace, and the institution, everyday urban space is the connective tissue that binds daily lives together. Everyday space stands in contrast to the carefully planned, officially designated, and often underused public spaces that can be found in most Western-planned cities.

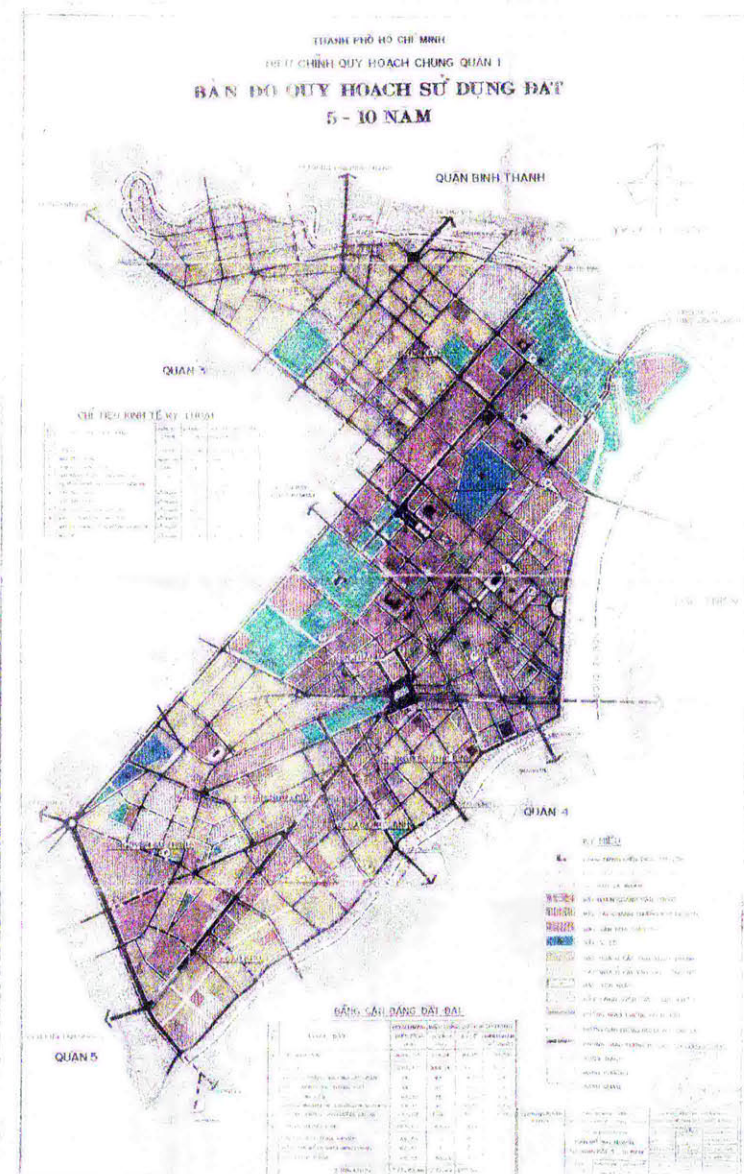
These monumental spaces only punctuate the larger and more diffuse landscape of everyday life, which tends to be banal and repetitive, everywhere and nowhere, obvious yet invisible (Crawford 6). As for pseudo-public space – they have been defined as ‘private spaces or spaces administrated by private companies that are disguised as public spaces’ (Ursula Hofbauer, Friedemann Derschmidt 109).

My curiosity lies in which actions in which spaces can leave behind more enduring traces and how do the city’s users become aware of these traces? How can ‘shop owner’ spaces and ‘street vendor’ spaces be meshed and intertwined, in a way that informs the city of how spaces can be flexible and used in a variety of ways while also underlining a common ground of equality?



ANALYSIS



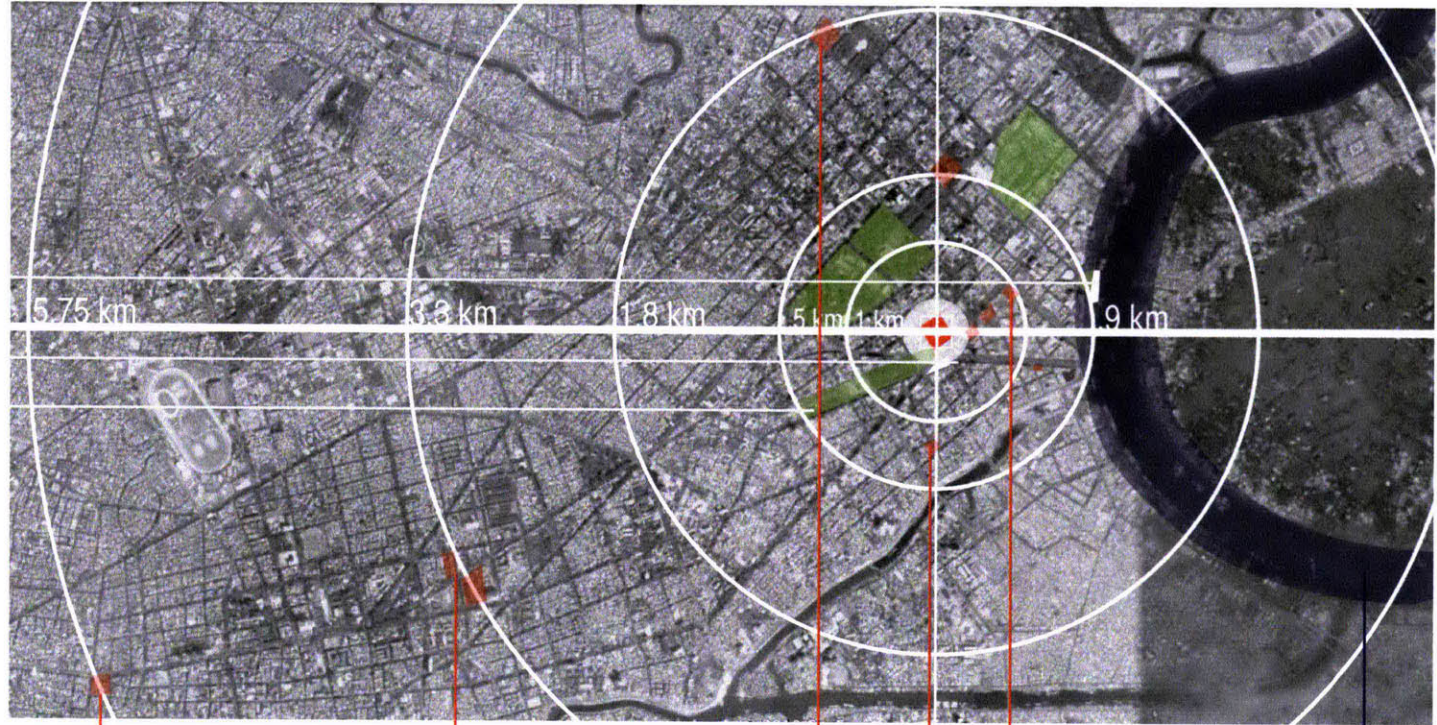




Thu Thiem Ferry

HCMC bus center

September 23 Park /
ackpaper d d rid



Binh Tay Market
[District 6, wholesale]

An Dong Market / Plaza
[District 5, clothes + food stalls]

Tan Dinh Market
[District 1, open food/wet]

Dan Sinh Market / Cho Cu
[District 1, hardware, war surplus]

Saigon Square / Center, Tax Mart

Saigon River

SƠ ĐỒ QUY HOẠCH NGÀNH HÀNG CHỢ BẾN THÀNH

PRODUCTS (ARTICLES) PLANNING DIAGRAM

ĐƯỜNG PHAN BỘI CHÂU

03A: CÔNG NGHỆ THỰC PHẨM
INDUSTRIAL PRODUCTS.

03D: BỘ TRANG BỨC, BỘ THỒ CÙNG
BỘ DÙNG NỒI TRƯỞNG, CÔNG NGHỆ PHÂN

03C, 03F, 04F: TRÁI CÂY VÀ HAU
CỦ QUẢ CÁC LOẠI
FRUITS, VEGETABLES, TUBER.

03D: LƯƠNG THỰC, TRÀ, CAFE, MỸ NGHỆ
FOOD, TEA, COFFEE, FINEART.

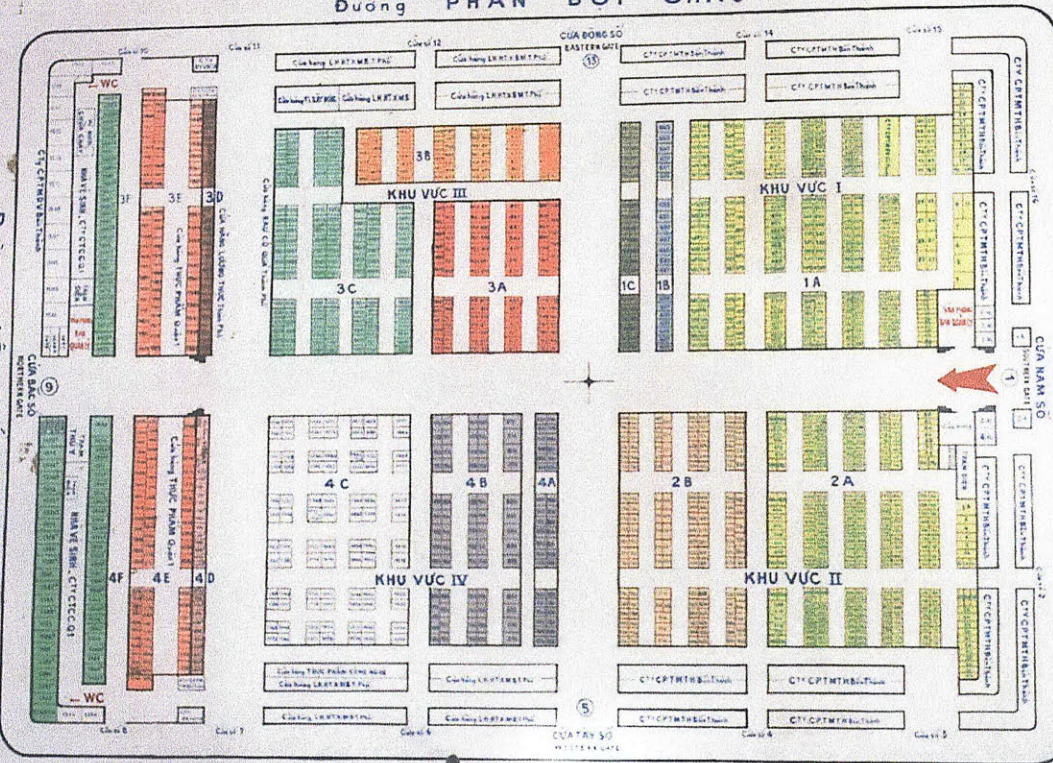
03E, 04E: THỰC PHẨM TƯƠI SỐNG

04A, 04B: MỸ NGHỆ, BIỂU GIA DỤNG,
SẢN SỰ THỦY TINH, BỘ MÁY TRÁI LÁ,
BỘ NHỰA GIA DỤNG.

04C: ĂN UỐNG
FOOD DRINKS.

04D: THỰC PHẨM CHẾ BIẾN
PROCESSED FOODSTUFFS.

ĐƯỜNG LÊ THÀNH TÔN



ĐƯỜNG PHAN CHU TRINH

Công trường QUÁCH THỊ TRANG

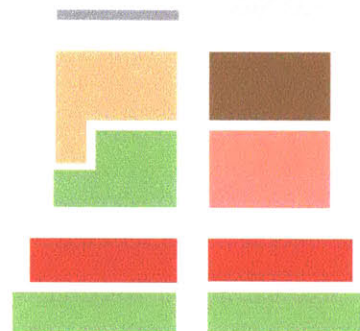
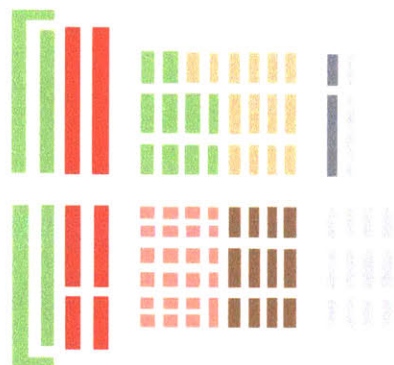
01A, 02A: VAI, QUẦN AÔ, BỘ DÙNG TREEM
TUI XÁCH, TRANH THÊU, MUNG MÈN,
DRAP, KIM CHỈ

CLOTH, GARMENT, ARTICLES FOR CHILDREN,
HANDBAG, EMBROIDERED PATTERNS, MOSQUITO,
BLANKET, DRAP, NEEDLE THREAD

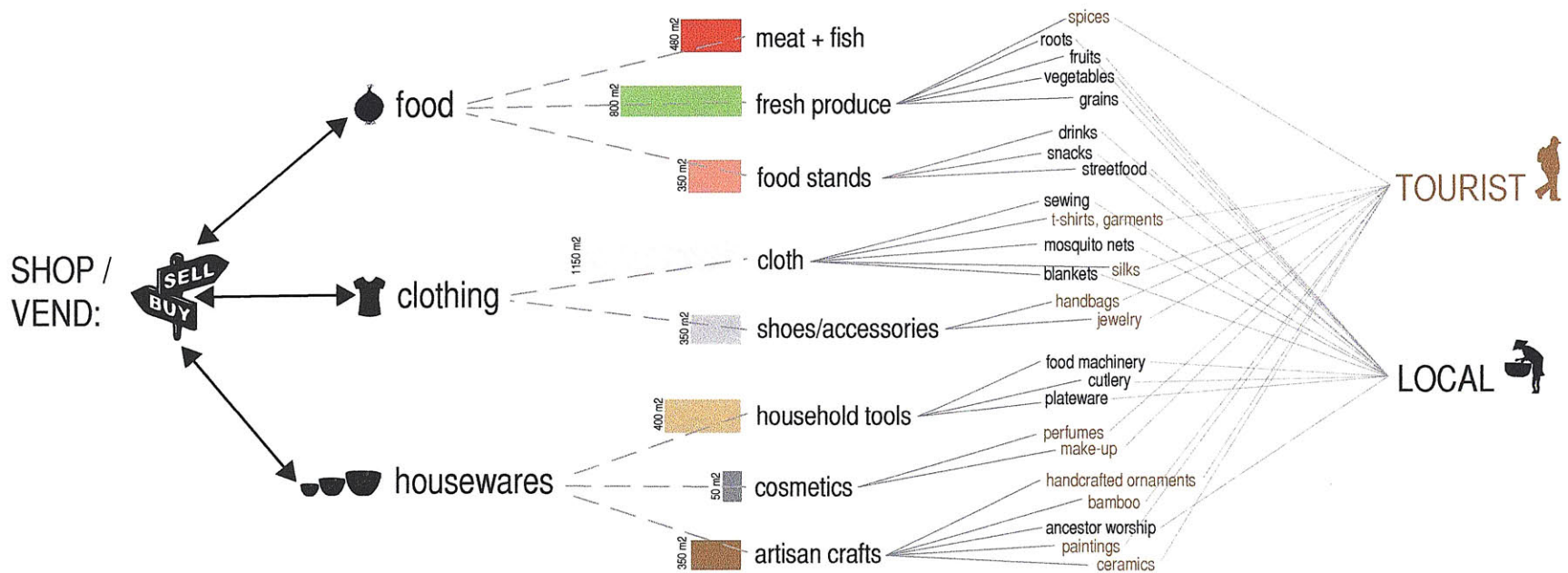
01B: BỐ DA, TUI XÁCH, AÔ GI MƯA,
KHĂN TRẢI BÀN
LEATHER ARTICLES, HANDBAG, RAIN COAT,
TABLE CLOTH.

01C: MỸ PHẨM, BỘ TRANG SỨC
COSMETICS, ORNAMENTS.

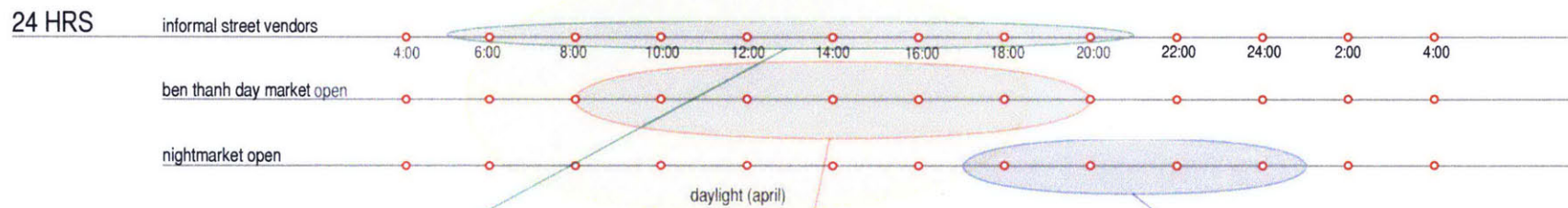
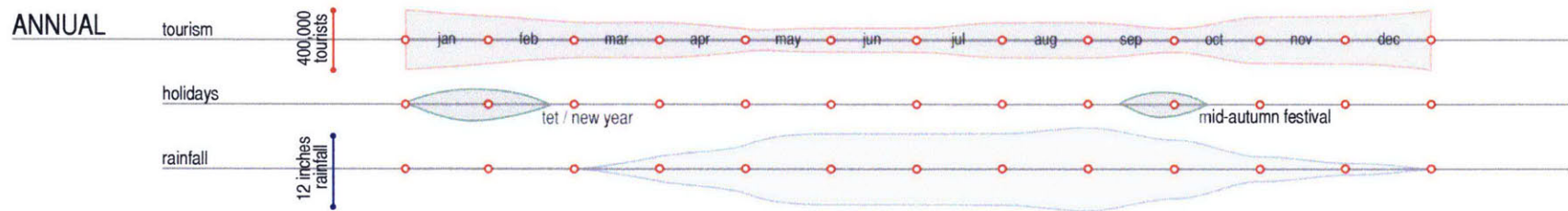
02B: GIẤY ĐEP, TUI XÁCH CƯỜM,
TẠP PHẨM
FOOTWEAR, HANDBAG BEAD, SUNDRIES

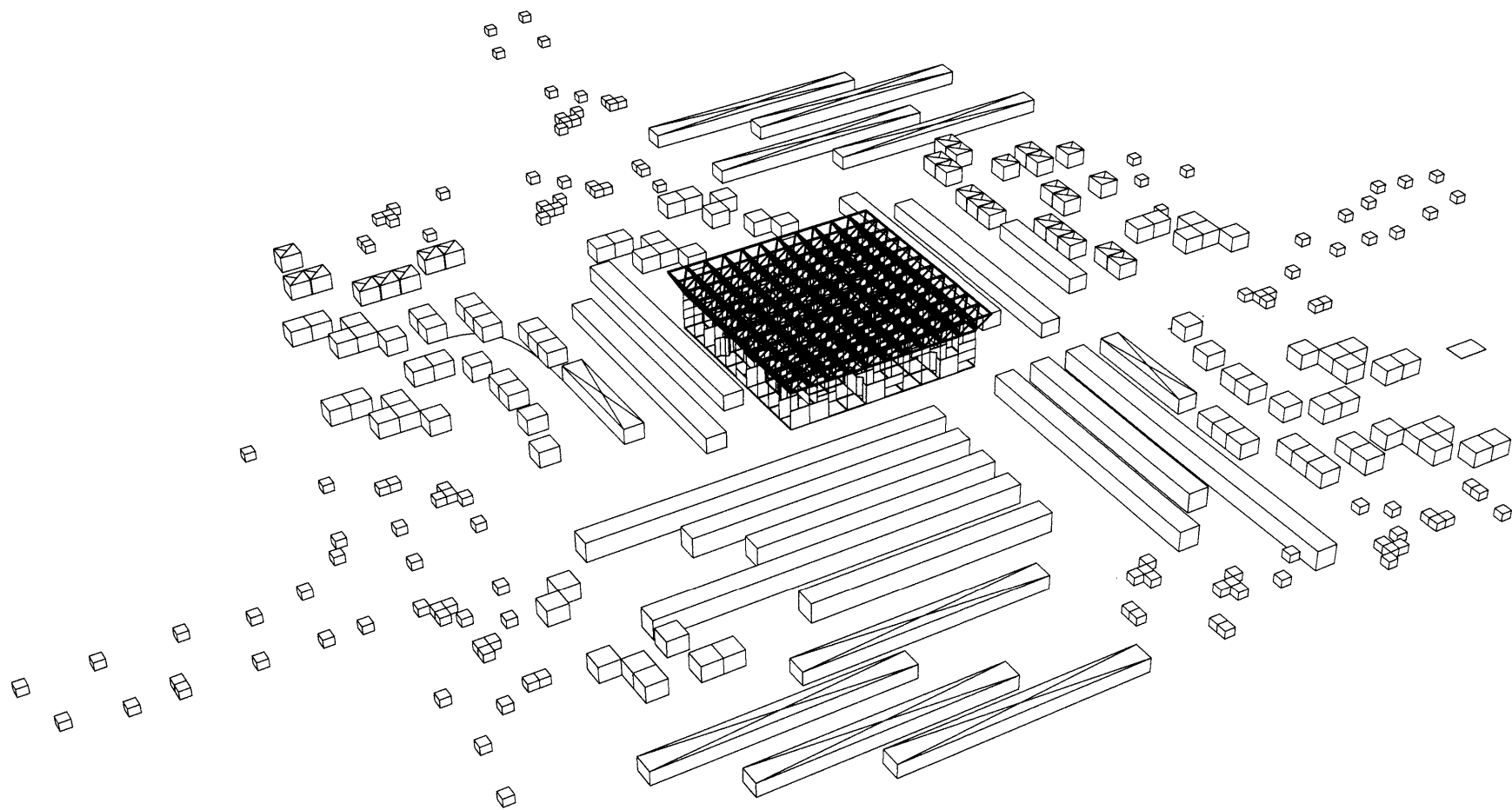


PROGRAM OF EXCHANGE

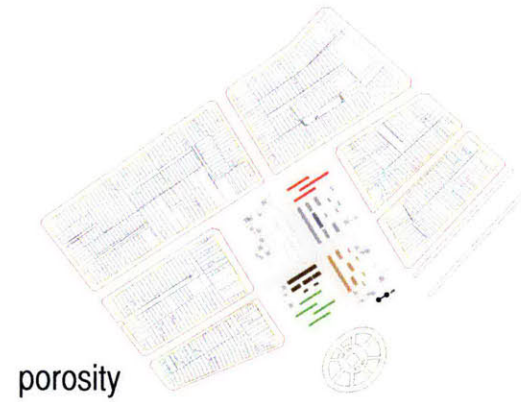
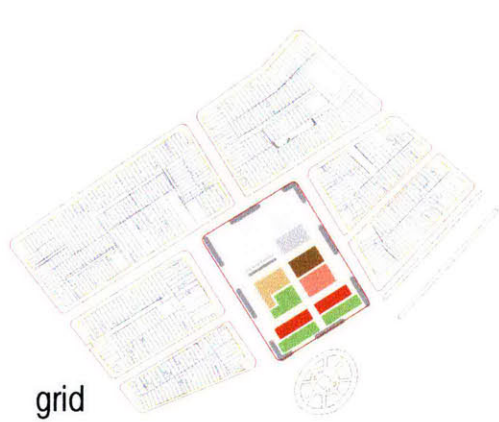


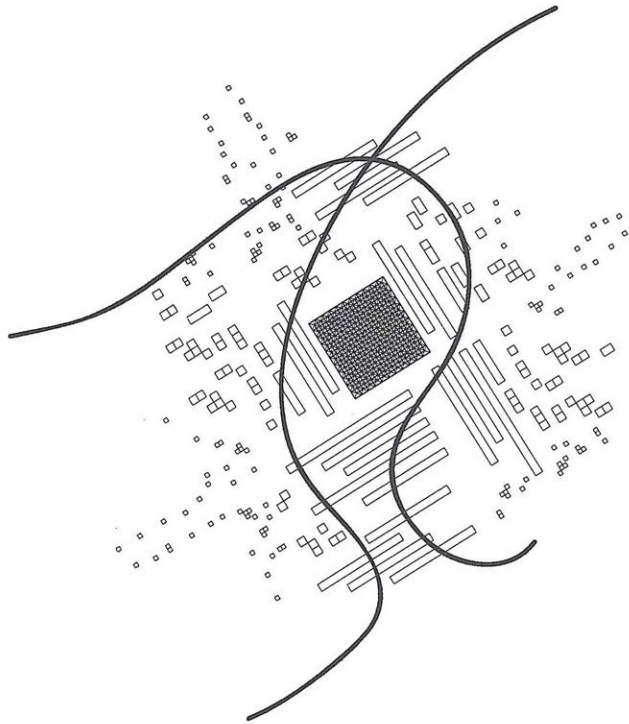
PROGRAM OF TIME



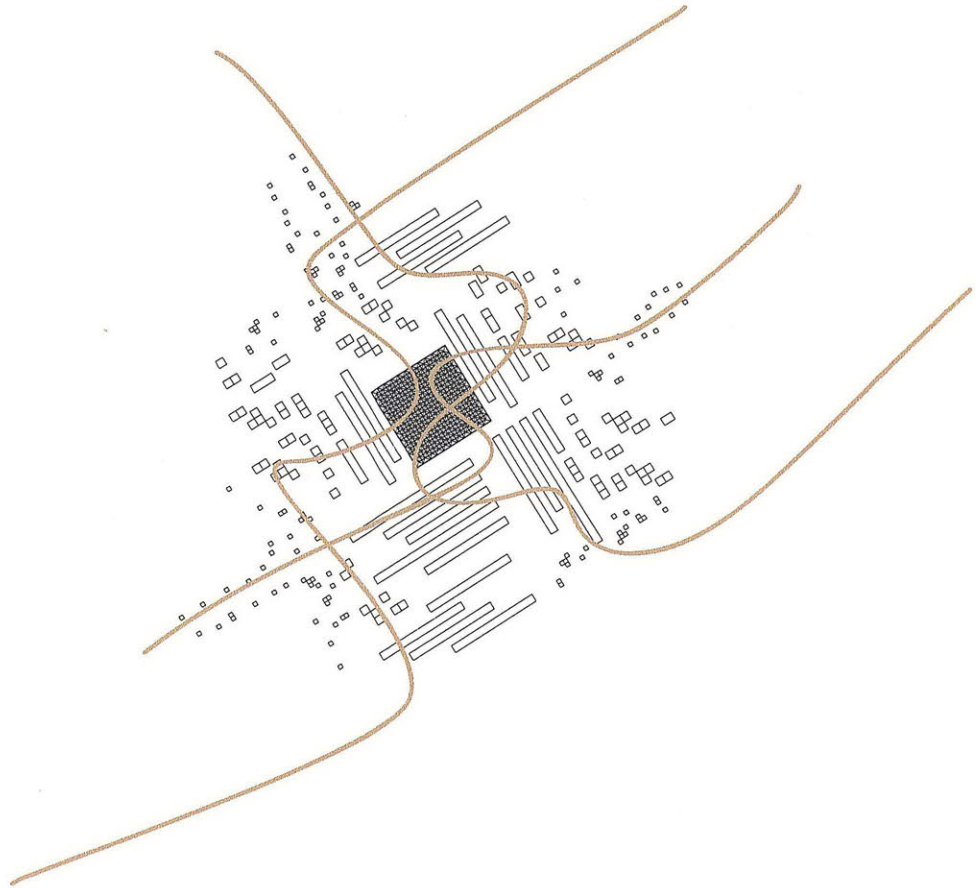


MARKET LAYOUT ANALYSIS





circulation: LOCALS



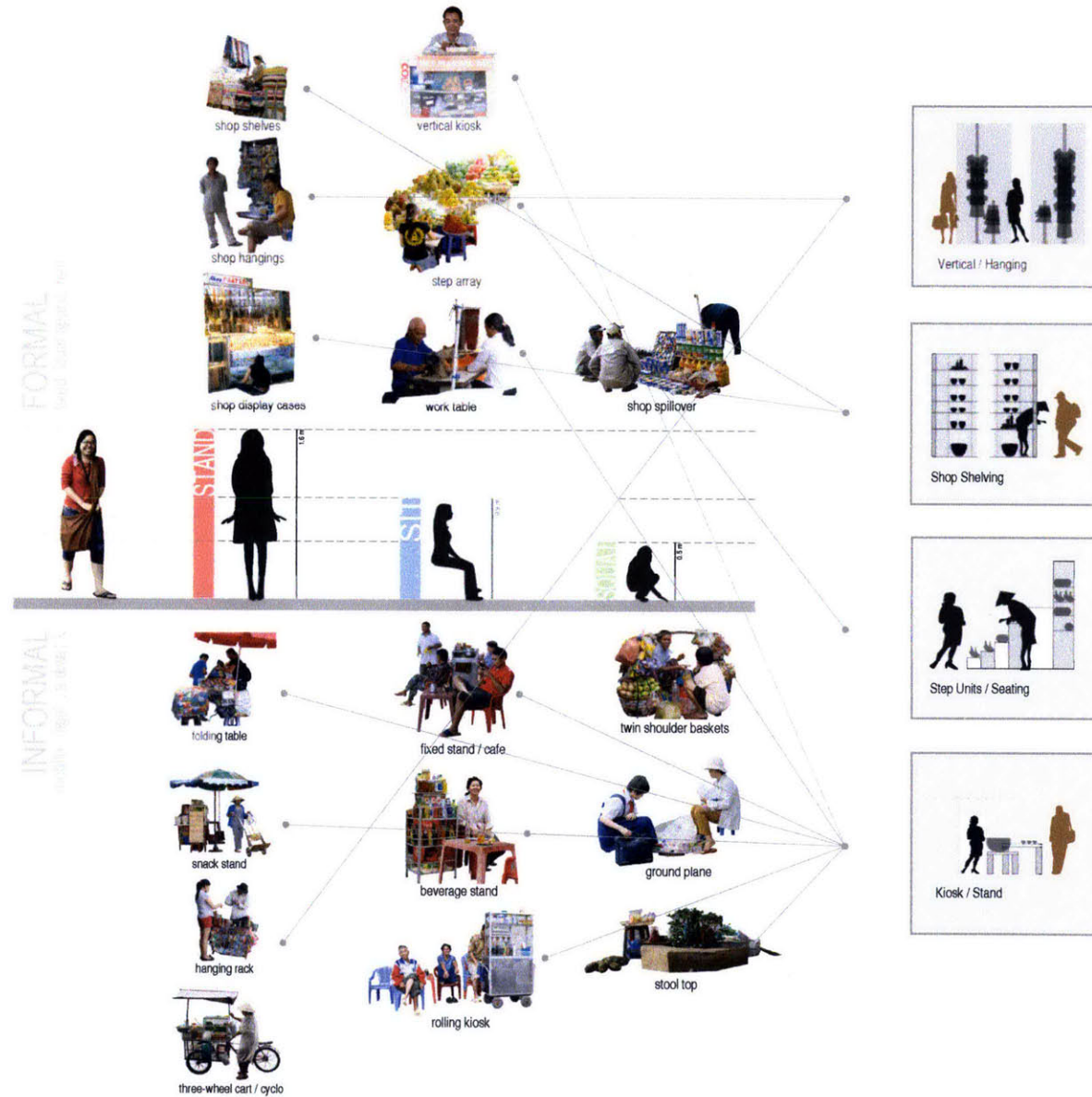
circulation: TOURISTS



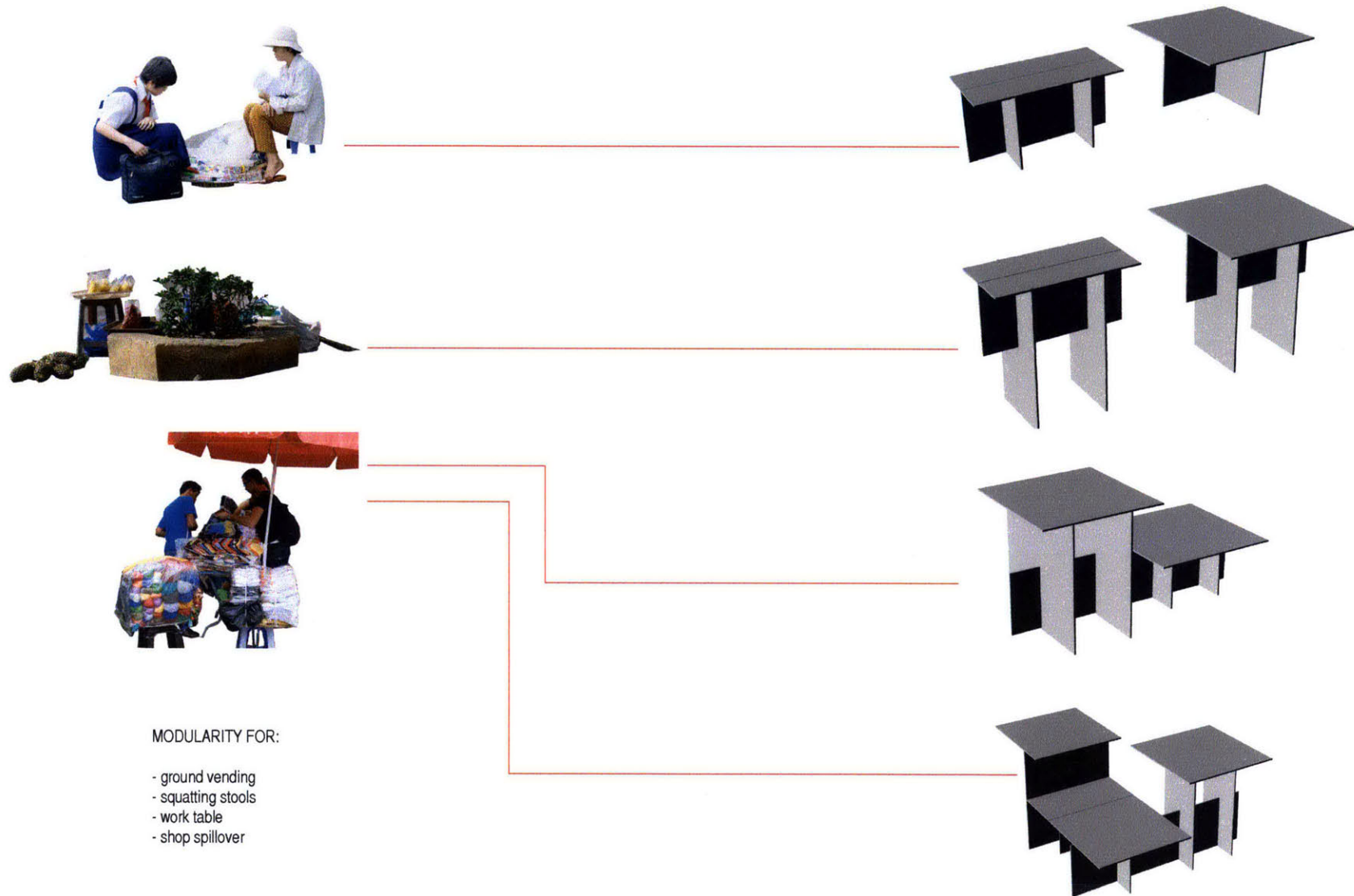
After analyzing the site conditions, market layout, circulation patterns, programs of time, and programs of exchange in Ben Thanh Market, I looked at the typologies of street vending itself. This included consideration of the body's relationship to the street and to the customer, as well as how the vending furniture adapts (or does not adapt) to a variety of situations and configurations.

I narrowed down the Formal and Informal categories into STAND, SIT, and SQUAT typologies of human behavior, and then broke those down further into four categories of vending furniture -- Vertical/Hanging, Shop Shelving, Shop Units / Seating, and Kiosk / Stand.

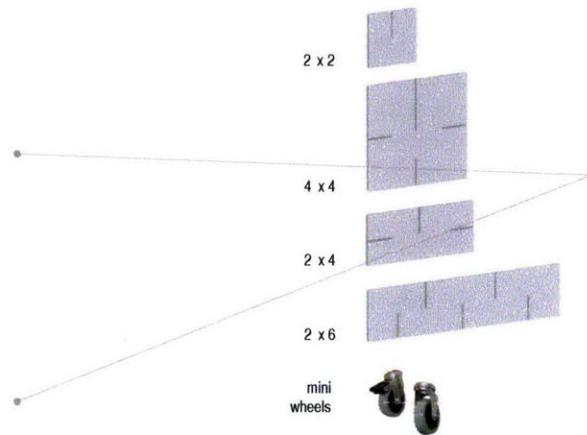
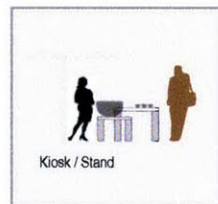
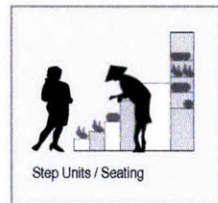
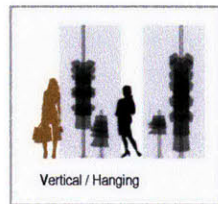
TYPOLOGIES OF EXCHANGE: behaviors at human scale



DESIGN PROPOSITIONS

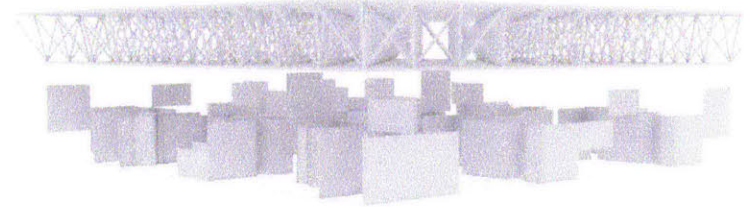


unified kit of parts

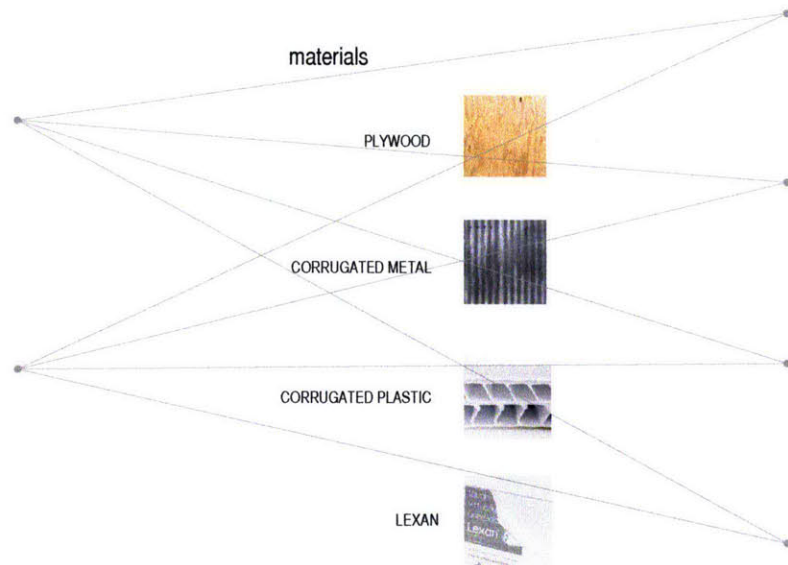


units and configurations

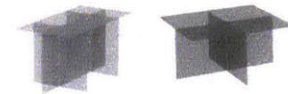
space frame and sliding walls



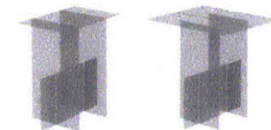
individual vending units



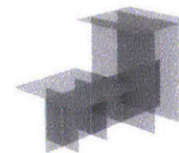
2 height



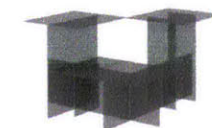
4 height



2 + 4 parallel



2 + 2 x 4 perpendicular

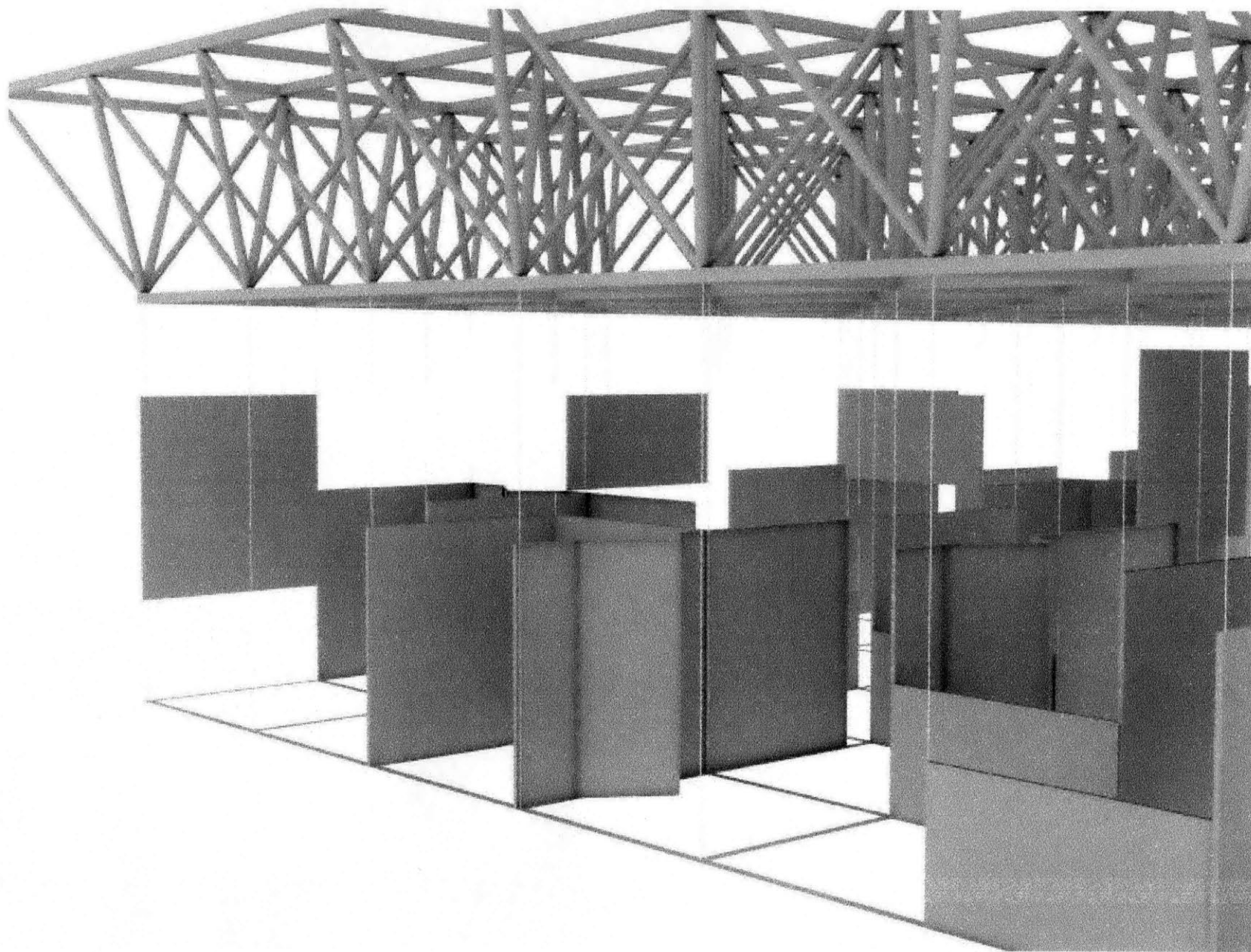


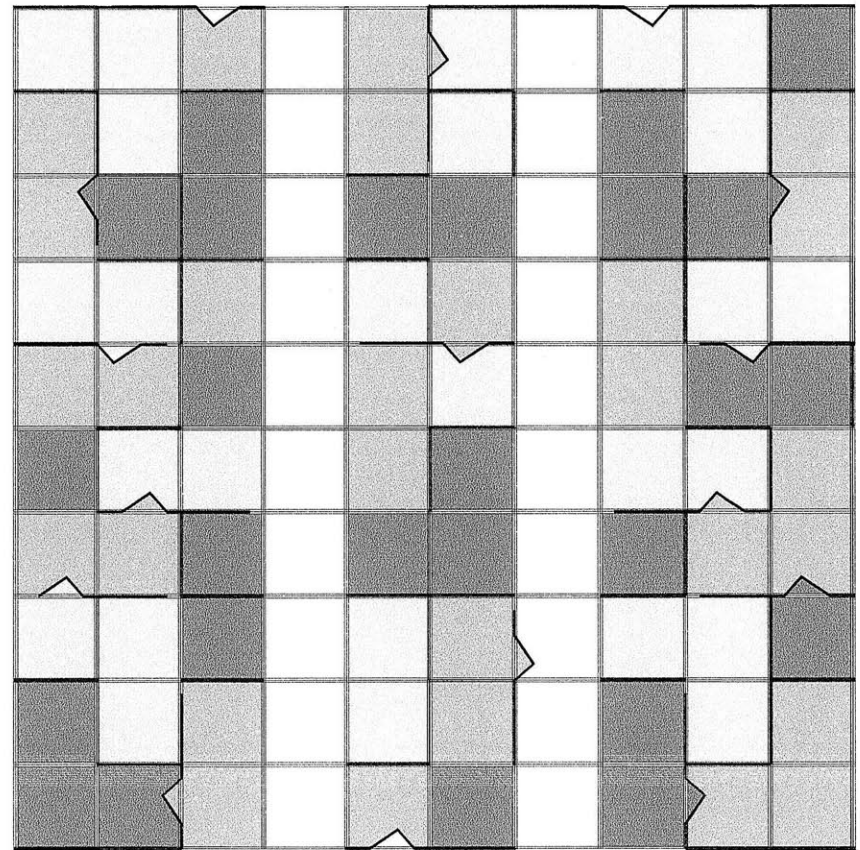
My design proposition is an urban intervention that takes cues from a common typology of vending that occurs both in formal shops and in informal street vending.

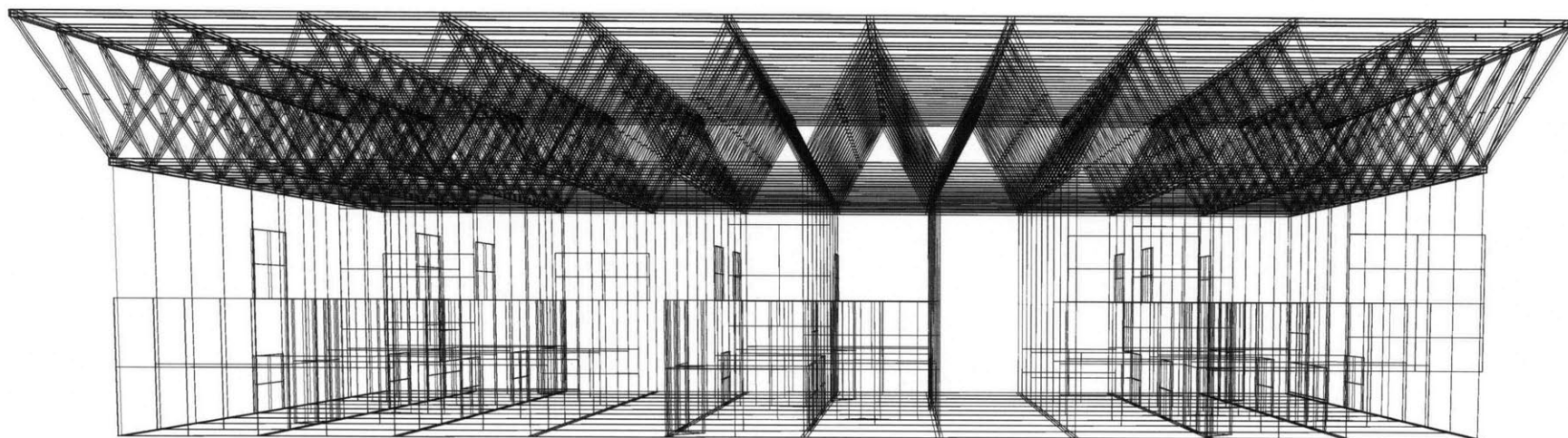
In rethinking the established spatial boundaries between the two, I propose to keep the existing Ben Thanh building, but tear down the four walls that surround it, in favor of a physical blurring space that allows informal and formal to intermesh, bleed through to the street and into the market center. Challenging the existing notion of inside and outside, this new porous layout would legitimize the vendors outside, while practically increasing much needed ventilation and circulation.

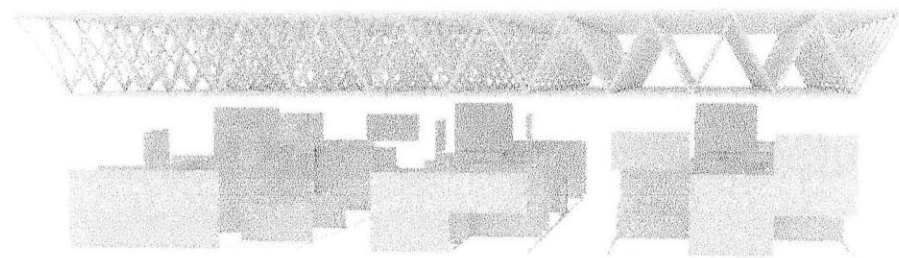
Some interventions include the possibility of an added space frame within the center of the market at the highest ceiling, for the purpose of establishing a system of sliding walls and panels that could be most effective for the vendors that carry their goods on vertical racks. These same panels could also be used to configure a set of vending tables and seats and kiosks. With a common system of vending furniture, a vending 'kit of parts' if you will, a wide variety of reconfigurations would be able to be created, adapting to the typology of each vendor and his/her daily practices.

Between indoor and out, informal and formal, the same language would be established, through which a new edge condition would emerge.











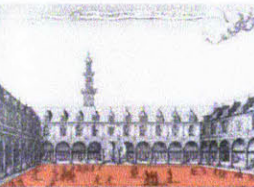
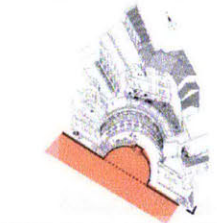
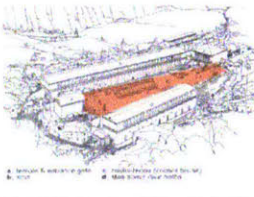
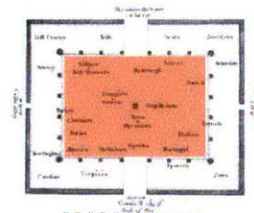
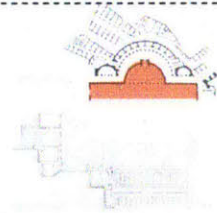
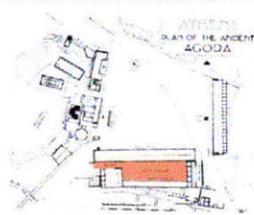




APPENDIX

tracing the market

historical typologies of exchange houses



GREEK AGORA

open square intermittently used as a market, formed as a meeting place between palace / main buildings; goods laid out on mats, temporary tables and stalls

600 BC

TRAJAN MARKETS

Rome

crescent-shaped multi-level terraces were one of the first defined, covered shop spaces - counters faced the public walkway for display and trading

100-500 AD

CLOTH HALL

Ypres, Belgium

one of largest commercial buildings of Middle Ages, served as main market/warehouse for cloth industry, stalls between columns of open ground floor

1300s

GRAND BAZAAR

Istanbul

First formally planned retail district, grid of covered streets with specialized shops in specific region of market, area = 200,000 sq m

1421

ROYAL EXCHANGE

London

First purpose-built trading building in England, arranged around a 2-level colonnaded courtyard; open stands and stalls on the first floor

1566-1700s

FA Bost Char

Boston

an exchange place

1806



FANUEIL HALL MARKET

Boston
Charles Bullfinch

an expanded and repurposed 1742 market gathering place, now a Rouse, a lively market place with outdoor/indoor mall, food court

1806

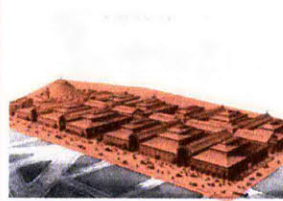


COVENT GARDEN

London
Charles Fowler

unified complex of arcades, 3 parallel buildings surrounded by arcades, connected by corner lodges, horses + carts occupied open space btwn bldgs, covered stalls for fruits/vegetables

1830



LES HALLES

Paris
Victor Baltard + Felix-Emmanuel Callet
series of modular pavilions with exposed cast-iron exterior and interior supports; influential iron-and-glass construction

1850s

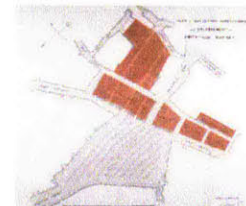


READING TERMINAL

Philadelphia
F. H. Kimball

enclosed public market with over 60 merchants, occupying the ground floor and basement levels of the former train shed, stalls arranged in grid pattern with central open area for seating

1859



SMITHFIELD

London
Sir Horace Jones

large meat market, last remaining wholesale market in Central London - main hall is covered by a concrete dome (elliptical paraboloid), the buildings stand on top of a warren of tunnels

[1000] 1868



GALLERIA VITTORIO EMANUELE II

Milan
Giuseppe Mengoni

grandiose covered double arcade, vaulted iron arcades at right angle in an octagon; 4 stories of luxury shops; influenced evolution of enclosed shopping malls

1873



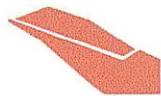
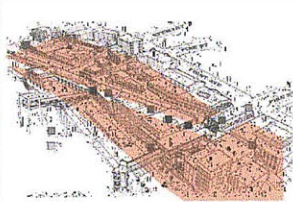
GALLERIA VITTORIO

Milan

Giuseppe Mengoni

grandiose covered double arcade of two glass-vaulted iron arcades at right angles intersecting in an octagon; 4 stories of luxury retail, directly influenced evolution of enclosed shopping mall

1873



PIKE PLACE

Seattle

Sir Horace Jones

one of oldest public farmers' markets in US - collection of buildings that began on a boardwalk, built on the edge of a steep hill, consists of several lower levels located below the main level.

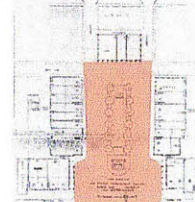
1907



BEN THANH MARKET

Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

(1859) 1912



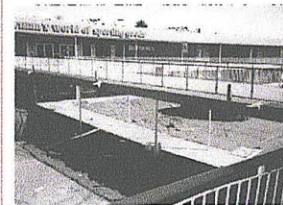
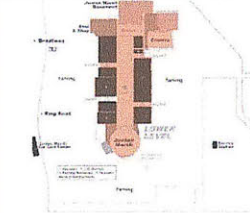
MARKET SQUARE

Chicago

Arthur Aldis

shopping complex of 26 stores, 12 office units, 30 apartments, gymnasium, clubhouse, one of first business districts to be laid out specifically to accommodate motor vehicles

1916



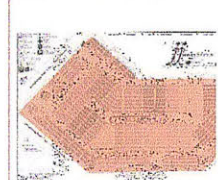
SHOPPERS' WORLD

Framingham, MA

Morris Ketchum

First dumbbell plan - department store, niches connected by outdoor pedestrian mall, futuristic, flying-saucer-esque Jordan Marsh; first cinema in a mall, courtyards in the center.

1951


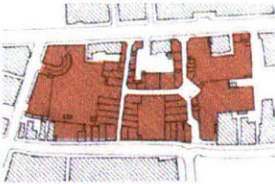
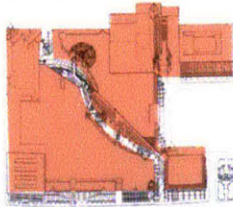
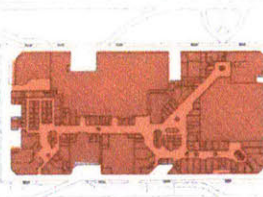
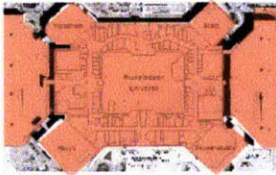









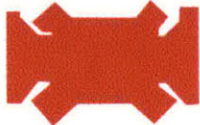


CHATUCHAK MARKET

Bangkok

idea to set up a flea market in ever Thailand, weekend market, moras and alleyways covers over 35 acres, contains upwards of 5,000 stalls

1982

				
				
				
<p>CHATUCHAK MARKET Bangkok idea to set up a flea market in every town in Thailand, weekend market, morass of vendors and alleyways covers over 35 acres and contains upwards of 5,000 stalls 1982</p>	<p>THE LANES Carlisle, England Building Design Partnership 2.4 hectares = 23000 sq m retail, 27 housing units, library, 513 parking spaces, occupies a long city block (260x100 m), shops open through city streets, covered with glazed pitched roofs 1984</p>	<p>HORTON PLAZA San Diego Jon Jerde occupies 6 blocks, as a CBD renaissance - fills town central space, multi-level open gallery carved out diagonally in arcs through retail space 1985</p>	<p>LA VAGUADA / MADRID 2 Madrid Europe's first and Madrid's largest regional mall - 350 outlets; includes leisure level: cinema, bowling, discotheques, mini amusement park, bars, cafes 1983</p>	<p>MALL OF AMERICA Minneapolis Jon Jerde largest shopping complex in US, super-regional, symmetrical building, with a roughly rectangular floor plan, 520+ stores arranged along three levels of pedestrian walkways 1992</p>

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